

The domestication of fire is perhaps the most eventful fact in human history. It completely changed man's diet, and, since cooked food is more easily assimilated than raw food, it may have set free energy that was absorbed in digestion. In metals it revealed a material for tools and weapons that was infinitely more effective than flint. And it opened out the earth's surface for man's habitation : without means of warming himself. he could never have migrated from the tropics. How fire was brought into harness can only be conjectured. Obviously its use must have become evident before efforts were made to keep it or kindle it; and we may suppose, with Charles Lamb. that its value first became apparent through the accidental discovery of its service in cooking. It is believed that the fires which rush through the forests of India and other tropical countries may be kindled by the friction of dry branches under a persistent hot wind, or by lightning : the bodies of animals that have been overtaken by the flames may be found scorched amongst the ashes; and it is quite possible that savage man, by chancing upon them, may have been led to the idea of cooking for himself. This would only be possible if brands from the forest fire were carefully preserved and fed : once extinguished they could not be rekindled, and we can understand the reverence with

which the
hearth was regarded, and the
importance that
was attached to the continuity of its
glow. In
the East the desolation of a village is
picturesquely
described by the expression "its fire has
gone out."
There followed the discovery that fire
could be
kindled by fire-sticks, or by flint and
steel. We
have grown too familiar with lucifer
matches